



THE NAVAJO NATION

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## Honor the legacy of Navajo Code Talker Kee Etsicitty and live courageously



*Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye reads the proclamation he issued that ordered flags across the Navajo Nation to be flown at half-staff in honor of Navajo Code Talker Kee Etsicitty, who passed on July 21. He encouraged the audience to honor Etsicitty's legacy by living courageously. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*

GALLUP, N.M.—The bells at Sacred Heart Cathedral Church tolled on the morning of July 24 to honor the life of Navajo Code Talker Kee Etsicitty.

His body was transported to the church for the memorial services and escorted by the members of the Navajo-Hopi Honor Riders, the non-profit organization that volunteered to repair the roof of Etsicitty's

home last October.

A member of the 3rd Marines, 7th Division, Etsicitty saw combat in the Battles of Guadalcanal, Bougainville, Guam, Saipan and Iwo Jima.

### **Paying respect to a hero**

Before he was laid to rest, Etsicitty's brothers came out to honor him. Navajo Code Talkers Thomas H. Begay, Peter

MacDonald, Alfred Neuman and Bill Toledo were in attendance.

The honor guards from the U.S. Marine Corps and the Ira H. Hayes American Legion Post 84 from Sacaton, Ariz. were also on hand to honor Etsicitty.

A number of dignitaries came out to pay their respects, including Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye, Sen. Carlyle Begay (D-Ariz.),

and Navajo Nation Council Delegates Seth Damon, Otto Tso and Leonard Tsosie.

### **Faithful Catholic, honorable American**

According to Etsicitty's son, Kurtis, his father was a devout Catholic and said he wanted his funeral services to be held at Cathedral Church. His wish was granted as hundreds filled



the massive church located atop a hill in downtown Gallup.

Before the services began, the U.S. Marines performed the flag folding ceremony in front of the church and presented the folded flag to Kurtis.

Etsicitty was only 16 when he enlisted, a responsibility he shouldered with the resolve to protect the Navajo Nation homeland from foreign invasion.

Kurtis said his father told him his decision to enlist was to prevent (foreigners) from taking away Navajo heritage.

### **Appreciation and respect**

President Begaye was given an opportunity to speak and began by thanking the U.S. Marines, the Honor Riders and the American Legion members that were in attendance.

However, it was the Navajo Code Talkers in the audience that commanded his attention and respect.

“Chairman Peter MacDonald, Thomas H. Begay, Alfred Neuman and Bill Toledo, it is an honor and a privilege to have these Code Talkers in our midst,” said President Begaye.

Speaking in Navajo, he gave appreciation to the children and grandchildren of Etsicitty and said the Navajo Nation was grateful for his courageous service, as evidenced by the proclamation that was issued to have flags across the Nation flown at half-staff.

He read the proclamation in its entirety.

### **Live courageously**

“I can’t imagine being the son or daughter of a Navajo Code Talker. To know that your father kept within himself a guarded secret of the U.S. military,” President Begaye said. “These national heroes, like Kee Etsicitty, did not fight with guns and bullets and missiles.

“(They fought with) something more powerful and sacred, the Navajo language, given to our people by the great

Creator,” he added.

The world is now finally learning of the secret that was protected all these years, he said, from the President of the United States to Congress to tribal nations and nations around the world.

“Learn your language, hold it sacred and protect it,” President Begaye said.

He said the world was saved from itself by the beautiful sound of our Navajo people, Dine’ bizaad. Live the legacy of Kee Etsicitty and do things courageously, he said.

“When the battle was raging, when the USS Arizona was at the bottom of the Pacific in the Hawaiian Islands, when the Jews were being incinerated in Europe, Kee Etsicitty signed up (for military service) and shipped out courageously,” said President Begaye.

### **Navajo Nation flag**

“I present the flag of the Navajo Nation with the four directions, the Four Sacred Mountains, the four cycles of life. That’s why our flag is always folded with corners showing,” President Begaye said.

He presented the flag and the signed proclamation to Kurtis and the Etsicitty family.

The Navajo Nation is grateful for the courage and sacrifice Kee Etsicitty displayed as a Navajo Code Talker.

“Live the legacy of Kee Etsicitty by not being afraid of the unknown. Don’t be afraid to step out like he did and embrace the challenges,” President Begaye said.

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*President Russell Begaye presents the Navajo Nation flag to Kurtis Etsicitty. President Begaye thanked Etsicitty’s family and said Kee was a national hero that got the recognition of the world. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*



*Before the start of the memorial services, the U.S. Marine Corps honor guard folded the American flag that was draped over Kee Etsicitty’s coffin and presented it to his son, Kurtis. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*



*These U.S. Marines stood proudly outside the church and awaited the services to begin. The Ira H. Hayes American legion Post 78 from Sacaton, Ariz. were also in attendance. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*